epic Magazine
An Honors Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

Lori K. Rader

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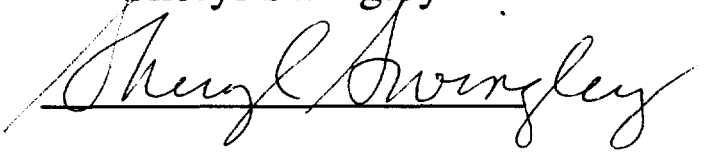

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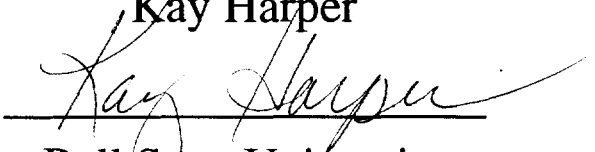

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The purpose of this creative project was to create a publication for the so-called Generation X without trying to label the audience or make assumptions about what the audience might read. The reasoning behind this project is covered in the editorial on pages 2 and 3 of the magazine.

I wrote all the articles, designed all the layouts and produced the magazine myself.

Note: the title of the magazine, *epic*, comes from the moment when I decided I had given myself too much work — a project of epic proportions.

epic

Volume 1 · Number 1 · Only 1

God Fearing Am

- History of Hell
- Women of God

epic Contents

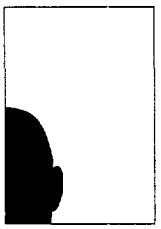
hell is not knowing.

find out page 14

DEPARTMENTS

EPIC TOPICAL

epic magazine is published once every lifetime by Lori K. Rader as her Honors Creative Project. It is not for profit or for sale.



X marks the spot

Let's stop kidding ourselves about this generation X thing. BY LORI K. RABER

If I hear one more person use the term Generation X in my direction, I swear I don't know what I'll do. That may sound very typical of my generation to say so, but I am a little tired of being corralled in with everyone else on Earth my age, give or take five years.

We're not all the same. And, what's more, I don't think we want to be. I don't know for sure because I haven't personally interviewed everyone between the ages of 32 and 17 or whatever age limits the X is encompassing these days. I don't want to perpetuate the myth that we all think alike by speaking for everyone else.

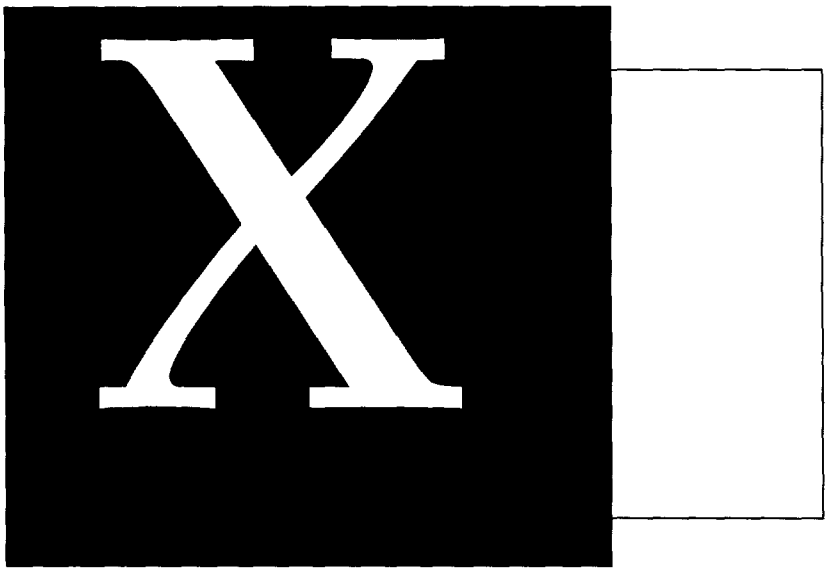
But for me, the term Generation X is a just a label. And, like most other labels, it denies the person in question his or her individuality. Like most other labels, it is a quick way to discard someone's thoughts and feelings. Like most other labels, it is offensive.

I try to live my life ignoring that most people in this world don't want to know anything more about me than what fits on my driver's license or on my paycheck stubs. I live with a lot of labels (*female* being the one most often thrown back at me). And I live around a lot of people who just want to be left alone instead of being targeted, pinpointed and labeled.

I think one of the problems I have with all this is that, in the end, it's all about money. Everything is, really. The term Generation X may have come from the book by Douglas Coupland (and, by the way, Doug, thanks), but it has become nothing more

than a part of the quick and dirty lingo of marketing. While Coupland may have wanted his fellow "Xers" to feel comfort in knowing they weren't alone in it all and to see the humor in their own situations, we can only feel a little betrayed when we're now Generation X, the market of choice.

So they want to sell us things. This is pretty much a fact. When I typed the words generation and X into the computer to pull out library listings for research, there were 136 entries. Half had to be discarded because of the computer's confusion between the words generation and genetics (I was getting some lively entries on chromosome X). Out of the remaining entries, I would say all but about 10 were from advertising and marketing journals, which provided abstracts promising the secrets of what generation Xers would buy and why.



The term generation X is just a label. Like most other labels, it is offensive.

Of course, they all had different opinions. Conflicting research concludes what, Corporate America? That we don't all think the same, buy the same things, dress the same way?

Don't let the secret get out.

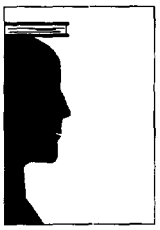
From the remaining 10, three were about new magazines directed toward the generation X crowd. Lots of Pearl Jam posters and cappaccino recipes, I'll bet. But it gave me a start. Here I was doing research for a magazine for my age group, scoffing at other magazines who were doing the same thing. Was I doing the same injustice to my generation as they were? Was I just another bandwagoneer? It's a difficult thing to doubt yourself so much.

It's not at all what I wanted to do. I didn't want to create another glossy, choppy MTV on paper. I wanted to prove that people my age can read, want to read, will read and will enjoy a magazine that does not talk down to them. I wanted to show that you didn't have to trick all of us into reading something by putting small words next to shiny pictures. I wanted to prove that flannel is not a way of life. I wanted to prove that one cannot survive on "Melrose Place" alone. I wanted to prove that not all of us are just posing for the "Real World" cameras.

I wanted to prove that we could think, dammit.

So this is why I chose to create a magazine from the ground up for my Honors Creative Project. I am taught as a journalism graphics major that the number of people in my generation who will read a magazine without being baited is getting smaller and that as a graphic journalist I should make things easier for people to read. But I subscribe to the sociological theory of Adrienne Rich—that to make people accomplish more, you must challenge them, not make things easier for them. I also wanted to combine my interests in design, writing and social issues into one final bow for my college performance. I wanted to prove something to myself.

I think I did.



books

Douglas Coupland had some nerve to write a bold book about his generation, but the rest of the world has even more nerve to think that *Generation X* is a textbook on how to deal with twentysomethings. *by Lori K. Rader*

I have to admit that I had a pre-existing bias toward this book. It appeared on the bookshelves amid a flurry of rave reviews and bah-humbugs long ago, but I was not paying attention. I had no idea how much this one book would affect my life.

I heard about the book from my best friend, who was surprised that I hadn't come across it in the reading that I'd done. Her personal opinion was that it was cool. "Generation X" was a term she could buy into and that Coupland had discovered the truth behind all our lives.

For a while the term also did not bother me. It did not change my life, and, well, other generations had nicknames, right?

Eventually I caught on that the "Generation X" that Coupland had named was now a target market—and Coupland had fed us directly to the marketing companies. Up until Coupland's book, our generation had been an unnamed but highly desirable market to attract. But "Generation X" told the world that we were all alike, that we were all underemployed and restless and slack. Marketing companies were all too willing to believe him.

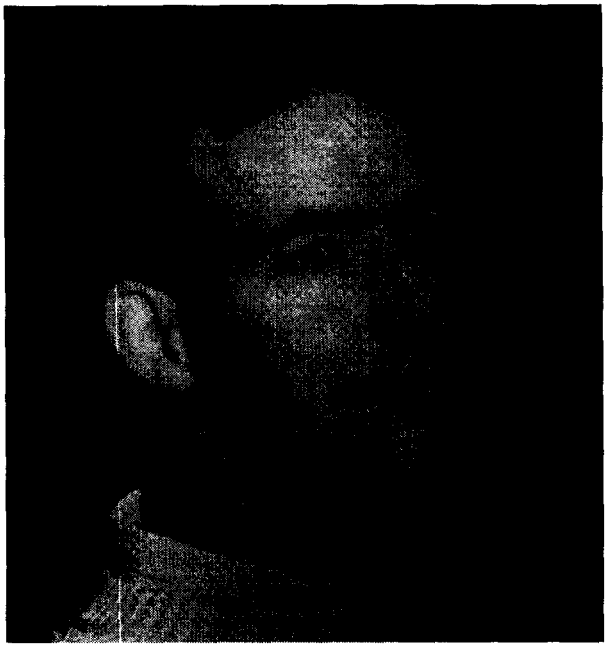
A friend who had already read the book asked me what I thought. When I told him I enjoyed the story but didn't believe in it, he didn't know what I meant. Actually I really didn't know what I meant, either, until I explained it aloud to him.

I said, "I try to look past stereotypes. But here's a label I can't get away from because the only thing that qualifies me is my age."

So does being the same age make us all alike?

About as much as being the same color makes us alike.

But in support of Douglas Coupland (pictured, this page), I don't think he meant for anyone to think that an entire generation fit into the characters he created. It was as story, and I think many people just took Coupland a little too seriously. These are characters, not people. Even if they remind you of someone you know, they don't represent an entire decade of births. I found hardly any connection between myself and the characters in the this book. But that doesn't mean it is not a good book.



I try to defy all labels and stereotypes, but here's one I can't get away from.

The story itself is very entertaining and has some lessons in it. But, for the sake of the twentysomething generation, don't take it as a way of life.

On that note, let's just say that "Generation X" is a good book. It is pretty funny, even if you don't see yourself in the characters.

It is also very annoying at times, because of the way the characters talk:

"Her hair was totally 1950s Indiana Woolworth perfume clerk. You know—sweet but dumb—she'll marry her way out of the trailer park some day soon. But the dress was early '60s Aeroflot stewardess—you know—that really sad blue the Russians used before they all started wanting to buy Sonys and having Guy Laroche design their Politburo caps. And such make-up! Perfect '70s Mary Quant, with these little PVC floral appliqué earrings that looked like antiskid bathtub stickers from a gay Hollywood tub circa 1956. She really caught the sadness—she was the hippest person there. Totally."

Actually, this paragraph is from the opening of the book and is attributed to Tracey, 27. So apparently Coupland would have us believe that, not only do people of Generation X really talk like this, but he personally knows one named Tracey. So there.

He then proceeds to make his characters talk the same way. A lot.

But there are endearing parts to the book. There is a very close group of three who are platonic friends, two male and one female. They support each other, worry about each other, talk each other into getting through a few more days. They also get all ready for bed and tell each other bedtime stories. They go on country picnics to strange, abandoned places to tell more stories.

It is really the stories that make up the bulk of the book. Each is a beautifully told tale—some supposedly "true." Each one gives more insight into each character's mind. Many of them do actually give some insight into how someone of this supposed generation would look at the world. Some of them are just funny. That's what a story is all about. Unfortunately, many people have forgotten that Coupland's book is just that. A story.

A good story.

Tarantino has the entire world on a string. People follow him around. Actors bang on his door. One Oscar later, he's today's super star. Suddenly everyone says they always knew he would make it someday. *by Lori K. Rader*

Pulp Fiction leaves the audience with a few interesting unanswered questions. *So what's in the briefcase? Why does John Travolta's gangster character spend so much time in the bathroom? And where the hell did this Tarantino guy come from anyway?*

It's getting pretty difficult to avoid hearing about Quentin Tarantino these days, ever since the writer, director and actor dropped onto the film scene from—apparently—nowhere in 1992 with his brutally realistic "Reservoir Dogs." And the world is still reeling from the film, which features a 10-minute torture scene starring a severed ear. During a showing of it, horror director Wes Craven and horror special effects artist Rick Baker walked out.

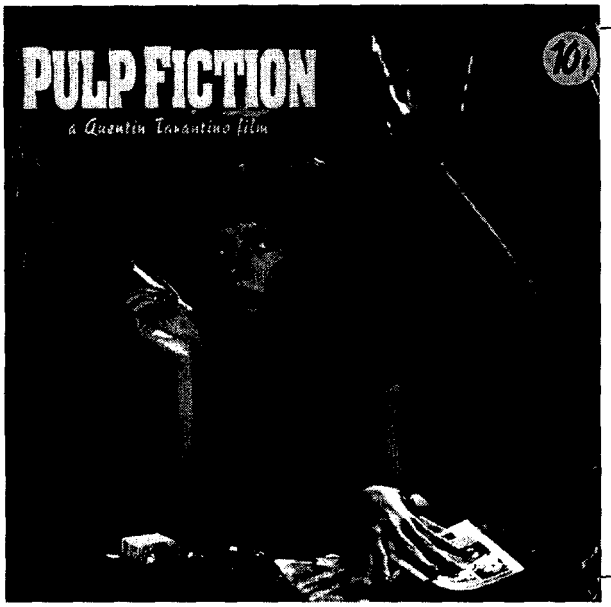
"It never bothered me that people walked out," Tarantino told journalist David Wild in a "Rolling Stone" interview. "It just meant the scene worked. Go to a video store and nine out of 10 films in the action-adventure section are more graphic than mine. But I'm not interested in making a cartoon. I'm interested in making the violence real."

No one doubts Tarantino's estimate on video store holdings. By the time he dropped out of school at the age of 14, Tarantino was already devouring every movie he could find. After he left

school, his first film job loomed—in the form of a clerk position at Video Archives, a video rental store in Manhattan Beach, Calif.

"People ask me if I went to film school," Tarantino said to "Rolling Stone." "And I tell them, 'No, I went to *films*.'"

The director, who did attend acting classes for a time, spent years absorbing every film known to man and now boasts an amazing recall of Hollywood's finest (and worst) film scenes. He has a reference for every situation he directs—and possibly a little trouble playing a role besides the quintessential movie fan.



Quentin Tarantino is first and foremost a movie *fan*. He just makes them, too.

In a West Hollywood apartment in the same building where *Pulp Fiction*'s star, John Travolta, once lived, the 31-year-old film buff lives out a modestly normal life. The story goes that his apartment is decorated ceiling to floor in movie and television memorabilia, including treasures from such masterpieces as "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and "Welcome Back, Kotter". In fact, above Tarantino's fireplace is a shrine to the former star of "Kotter" and new star of "Pulp Fiction," Travolta.

"I didn't tell John about the shrine," Tarantino said of his meeting with Travolta before he cast him. "But I did bring along my Vinnie Barbarino doll so he could sign it for me."

Tarantino's eclectic tastes in entertainment run pretty much hither and yon: his reference material includes classic and cult films; he recognizes the potential of "Baywatch's" David Hasselhoff; his collection of film/television board games includes the intriguing "Dukes of Hazard" edition.

And perhaps it is this inexhaustible and unexplainable penchant for the odd that has the world in its Tarantino trance. The buzz about Quentin (named after a character on "Gunsmoke") began long ago with "Reservoir Dogs," but many did not catch on until his second effort took top honors at the Cannes Film Festival last spring.

Now his name is the magic word. The media can't get enough of him. Actors take bargain-priced salaries to work with him. Awards have already started to pour in. He and several of his stars were expected to cart home their weights in golden statues this year at the Academy Awards. Or at least that's the buzz.

Apparently Tarantino hasn't been listening to it.

He's still in the same messy apartment his mother thinks is more frightening than anything he's put on screen. He's still watching movies whenever he can. And, troubling as it is for his fans, he has plans in the future that may not involve Hollywood.

"I've got to take some time to have a life," he said.

Tarantino reportedly has already chosen a few new projects, however, and will be seen next discussing the homosexual undertones of "Top Gun" in the film "Sleep With Me." So—momentarily—the plans for a life are on hold.

Or, more likely, Tarantino's life *is* making movies.

people

Once an aspiring cheese shop owner, Brent Royster is now a wordsmith seeking the exactly-right combination of words to explain himself, the world, Legos and cheddar. *by Lori K. Rader*

"The way I look at time is that ... the future doesn't exist to any great extent," Royster says, displaying the thought processes gleaned from a philosophy minor, in addition to his English major and creative writing minor. "I realize I can talk about the future as if you can plan for something about to happen. And when you have planned for it, and it happens, you think, 'Oh, there is a future because, look, I planned for it, and it happened.' But that happens so infrequently and, when it does happen, it usually happens different—very different—from what you have planned. The future has ceased to have a great deal of meaning."

The present, Royster explains, is too susceptible to his indecisive whims to mean much.

"But the past," he says, grinning. "The past is real. I know it has happened. And when I remember it or find artifacts from it, like a Hot Wheels car or..."

A tangent presents itself, and Royster's eyes light up. "I found my Legos, and it was such a real find to have all my Legos in the dorms. I'd dig them out, and people would come down the hall. 'Hey, Royster,'" he laughs. "'You're playing with Legos ... Can I play?'"

Royster's mind suddenly changes about planning the future. He excitedly acts out the construction of a Lego kingdom. "This is what I'm going to spend my money on when I'm an older guy," he says. "I don't care about anything else."

Royster's hands wave in the air as he talks. "I see myself now as a person trying to reconnect with that past, that curiosity. Everybody finds them-

selves really dulled, the older they get. When I was a kid, I had all this energy, and it was independent of anything else. I had a curiosity I don't find now."

Before Royster decided to be a poet, he wanted to be an architect. Before that, a naval pilot, but the need for eyeglasses shot down the option. Before that, he wanted to own a cheese shop.

"I went to a cheese shop in Kentucky, and there were all these big wheels of cheese," Royster remembers. "And I loved cheese. I adored cheese. Cheddar cheese is probably my favorite. We didn't buy a lot of that expensive stuff, so I got really attached to cheddar."

Young poet Brent Royster strives to find the perfect words to explain things.

"So now I'm at the end of my college career," sighs Royster, looking around him thoughtfully. "People ask me, 'What are you gonna do, what are you gonna do?' I really don't know. I'll hem and haw and everything. I think I'll go to graduate school, maybe do this, but it's really so uncertain. It's really so uncertain. My mom will say, 'You could open a cheese shop.'"

But the Muses call Royster to something other than Monterrey Jack.

Brent Royster does not have a daughter, but he knows exactly how Hanna would look and how she and her brother Austin Eads, also unborn, would fit into his life, if they were real. The names were chosen by Royster as those of children he might have in the future, if he were planning the future. For now, though, the fictional Hanna serves only as a character in a series of poems Royster wrote. "Minerals Dissolve" was published by "The Flying Island," the newsprint magazine published by The Writers' Center of Indianapolis. Royster's work has also been seen in small journals such as "Nausea is the Square Root of Muncie" and "Forklift, Ohio." His poems have been published on the Ball State campus in "Riverbend," the English department's literary magazine, of which Royster was editor for a year.

He also takes part in poetry readings put on by the Silvery Moon Poets, a campus group which performs two nights a month at the MT Cup, the coffee house in the Village.

"A lot of it's probably esteem," explains Royster. "I like it when people enjoy it. I also like it when I have an audience, even if they're not going to enjoy it. Nevertheless, they're sitting there, drinking coffee, and they're content. They're willing to give me three minutes."

Royster is more confident about the poems he has yet to write, although at this point, poetry is not the focus of his life. But Royster's voice murmur a poet's romanticism whenever he talks about words. They roll off his tongue easily as he speaks nearly wistfully of poems yet unwritten, of the uncertain present, of a past filled with Legos and of a future which he will not plan beyond the three minutes it takes for him to recite a poem.

all about eve

How can women bridge the gap between Eve and the Great Mother?

by Lori K. Rader

I found God in myself and I lived her fiercely.

Within a delicate outstretched hand, Eve holds the fruit. It is the fruit of temptation and of sin. It is the fruit of desire and of greed. It is the fruit of the fall of all womankind.

Forget for a moment everything but the story. Forget your personal beliefs and any doubts you have about religion in general or Christianity in particular. Forget archaeological findings. Forget that apples never actually grew in the area. Forget that the event may be more of a metaphor than an actual occurrence.Think only of Eve with the fruit sitting on her palm and the light of Eden on her face.

Whether or not any of this actually happened, this is the vision of woman which permeates the Bible, the greatest selling book of all time and the only book that some people will ever read during their lifetimes. Woman as the deceptor. Woman as the liar, the whore who sells her immortality for a piece of produce and takes her lover down with her.

From this genesis, how could womankind stand a chance? With the weight of the world's mortality on her shoulders, how can woman expect anything but the role of the secondary human, the permanent helper to man?

She cannot, not with society telling her from the moment she is born that she can blame her sister Eve for destroying a covenant with the male god. She cannot expect more, not with law, education, literature, economics, philosophy, psychology and the media all telling her that she was created as an afterthought.

It's safe to blame the character Eve for the subservient role women have been forced to play over the centuries, but the actual fault does not end with her. There are many more unseen characters in this tale: the creator of a religion that, in its path to being a so-called loving faith, destroyed innumerable lives; the creator of this myth which both borrowed from and replaced other creation myths; the author of this story and others, which sought to undermine an existing faith and the gender it worshiped; those since who have dismissed the existence and validity of ancient faiths and the countless followers of the newer religions who accepted—and accepted blindly—without seriously questioning what once was. And god was once a woman.

Simone de Beauvoir wrote in "The Second Sex:" "Man enjoys the great advantage of having a god endorse the code he writes; and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women, it is especially fortunate that this authority

fault

has been vested in him by the Supreme Being. Man is master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female."

How fortunate for men, de Beauvoir writes, that they were created in God's image and divinely chosen to rule this kingdom. How convenient that the authority of mankind cannot be challenged without rejecting the Judeo-Christian and Islamic gods.

Convenience, though, does not mean coincidence.

When tackling any sociological issue, the first step is to pick apart existing evidence, paying close attention to the possible inherent biases. The biases of those responsible for work always find a way into the work itself, no matter how scientific. So it may be convenient for men that the Bible gives them the divine right to rule, but is it a coincidence that a man (or group of men) wrote the Bible ? Or that the Bible has been translated by men? Or that the historical studies and archaeological excavations have all had men as the mastermind? Is it a coincidence that the few remaining artifacts of past faiths—goddess worship—were cast aside as meaningless bobbles of history?

fruit of knowledge

This is not a coincidence at all, according to some historians, but a terrible inconvenience for half of the world's population.

Historian and theologian Daphne Hampson, who studied the relationship between feminism and Christianity in her book "Theology and Feminism," believes that the feminine half of the world may be ready for a change. Feminism, she says, may be the "death-knell of Christianity" because it strikes at the heart of Christianity—the trinity, with its father and son and male metaphors. The absence of the feminine in the Christian faith will be the downfall of the religion, she predicts.

The downfall of female-based religions of the past and the societies which practiced them, however, were male-based faiths and the wars they raged.

In the book she researched for 10 years, "When God was a Woman," Merlin Stone writes, "I finally began to comprehend the total reality [of the religion of the goddess]. It was more than an inscription of an ancient prayer, more than an art relic sitting on a museum shelf behind glass ... Placed side by side, the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle revealed the overall structure of a geographically vast and major religion, one that had affected the lives of multitudes of people over thousands of years. Just like the religions of today, it was totally integrated into the patterns and laws of society, the morals and attitudes associated with those theological beliefs probably reaching deep into even the most agnostic or atheistic of minds."

An entire other world has existed, when male-oriented religion had yet to tear down temples and statues, when priests had not yet burned sacred writings of "pagan cults" and when woman could see the goddess and a greatness within herself.

sin

Ishtar: Unto Her renders decision, Goddess of all things, Unto the Lady of Heaven and Earth who receives supplication; Unto Her who hears petition, who entertains prayer; Unto the compassionate Goddess who loves righteousness; Ishtar the Queen, who suppresses all that is confused. To the Queen of Heaven, the Goddess of the Universe, the One who walked in terrible Chaos and brought life by the Law of Love; And out of Chaos brought us harmony.

guilt

It should not be misunderstood that societies practicing goddess worship were utopian societies, but it is important to understand that women were not seen as inferior. How could they be, these human images of the goddess? But that does not mean they were superior to men; these cultures were egalitarian, with men and women holding equal places in society.

There has been a peaceful time in history when men and women worked together in equal roles. Is it a coincidence for women that it was during the time of the goddess, or just convenient?

Yet how convenient is it that female-based religions foster a peaceful, egalitarian way of life? Is it convenient for women today, as they try to survive in a male-dominate society? Is it convenient at all, when the goddess is all but gone with a slim chance for her return? There is no coincidence, only historical findings.

Recognition of the goddess of the past may never be full. Religion is a deep and hidden root in the minds of human beings. Religion is our constant, our guiding light, what we depend on for reassurance of our place in the universe. It is too late to reclaim the goddess from the ashes of her burned temples.

But it is not too late to understand her and what happened to the world She created before He did. It is not too late to ask questions that have been ignored. It is not too late for women of today to understand that they, too, were created in an image of god and have a place in the world. It is not too late to learn what the goddess means to all of womankind, whether we worship her or just learn the lessons she holds—that female does not necessarily mean less divine.

The Gre

hell is where you put your fears

hell is where justice is served

by Lori K. Rader

Our new world is red, with fire licking at our legs as we enter. A cave, a cavern, an entire universe beneath the ground, beneath consciousness. A world which is burning or freezing, crowded with the dead or void of all sound and motion. A place unforgiving where we, unforgiven, have been sent to spend eternity.

Do we understand eternity — the forever we will spend in this dark, spinning place? Can we look around for others we've known who have burned before us? Do we see what we were told we'd see — Satan, that half-man, half-nightmare Mephistopheles with ruby skin and horns who wields a pitchfork?

Or do we think or see at all? Do we even know where or who we are when damnation finally claims our souls? Have we entered death without consciousness and expectations, leaving all human assumptions at the door?

Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.

at Below

hell is where your enemies go

hell is where you are now

hell is nothing at all

Almost everyone has a vision of hell, whether he or she believes it exists or not. Most often it is the classic fire and brimstone, a nightmare still festering from childhood imagination. It is the traditional fire-hole in the earth, where the devil waits patiently and is pleasantly surprised to see each new sufferer.

But other versions of the tale abound. Maybe it's a personal suffering, a custom-designed fitting punishment for crimes committed. It could be a desolate wasteland, or the life each individual already leads.

Or maybe there is no hell. To many, hell is only a metaphor for human suffering on Earth or just a mental storage place for all worldly fears so that reality will not seem so scary. Some people have trouble with the concept of suffering after death because the god they believe in would never create such a place. To others, hell is just as fictional a place as Oz.

Hell is a popular place — to write, think, and talk about, at least. The Great Below has enjoyed centuries of attention from people all over the world: theologians, philosophers, poets, writers, artists, the pious and the sinful.

The underworld, like a large train wreck we cannot tear our eyes from, or a larger-than-life horror movie, has always been somewhat more intriguing than heaven to the masses. But the view of a merry hell is also a source of comical entertainment, as well—a way to laugh at death, to defy it.

"No one is insulted if you make fun of hell," said Todd Wetzel, a senior public relations major from a Roman Catholic background. "Everyone is against hell, so they feel they can openly make fun of it. Who cares if you get Satan mad?"

Despite the levity with which hell is often regarded, despite the seemingly staged quality of it all, hell has had an enormous effect on the human race. What cracks apart religious groups but opinions on hell? What rules human behavior but the fear of hell? What except the horror of a hellish afterlife has kept people up at night for centuries?

Maybe the reason why hell wreaks such havoc with the mind is that the concept is so different from the idea of heaven. In the attention it gets, hell is often considered a sort of sister-city to heaven. Yet, heaven is most often acknowledged abstractly, as a blurry state of eternal bliss. Historically, hell has quite often been a place, a location that can almost be pointed to. Hell has been an oddly physical location to heaven's hazy existence; hell has been flesh to heaven's spirit. In this way, hell is a touchy topic for many people. Asking them what they believe will nearly always garner an ambigu-

ous answer. While they may know what they believe, putting words to the idea is not easy.

"Conceptually, it's a difficult thing and probably should be, because it's faith-oriented," said the Rev. Dave Newton, a priest at the Newman Center for more than three years. "If we knew for sure, there wouldn't be faith involved. I've got more questions than answers."

Mapping hell

Recent trends have shown hell as more of a psychological state than a location.

"As for it being a physical place, if you're drawing coordinates on a map," Newton said, "no, it's more of a state ... of being."

"Hell is a state of being," Wetzel said. "Hell is not a certain place. Hell is not *down there*. Hell is not necessarily hot, with fire. You can't pin it down."

Yet people have been trying to do just that since the beginning. What is death? What happens? Where do you go? The questions of hell have been an important part of the bigger questions of life — the questions humans spend their lives trying to answer.

"As kids, we're taught that heaven is a place and hell is a place and there's Satan and that there's God," Wetzel said.

hell is everywhere

"Most people believe in religion because they grew up believing in religion," said Julia Corbett, a professor of religious studies at Ball State for 15 years. "And the same goes for hell. People believe in hell because the churches, temples, and synagogues of which they are a part have that as part of their teachings."

But belief in hell often goes against many of the reasons why people are religious in the first place. Hope of an afterlife may calm the fear of death. Hope as a final reward for living the best life possible may make life easier. But what purpose does believing in hell serve? An eternal punishment hovering above your head can only bring back the fear of death.

"I think people believe in hell for the same reason they believe in heaven—namely, that we know from experience that the bad people don't always get punished and the good people don't get rewarded in this life," Corbett said. "It's the human sense of fair play."

Or could hell merely be a manipulative measure of religion, a way to keep the congregation in line?

"The picture of hell that's portrayed by the church is definitely not good," said Ange Cooksey, a member of the philosophy department. "It's not nice. It's not pretty. They don't want it to be. It's not a good managerial tactic for the church to make hell seem attractive in any way."

Optimism and annihilation

Whatever hell is or is said to be, it is probably the only place, sight, or state of being that most people believe they will never see. According to a recent Gallup poll, 60 percent of Americans admitted they believe in some concept of hell. Only 4 percent said they would end up there.

"It sounds like people are pretty optimistic," Newton said, reacting to the statistic.

Some believe the innocent go to heaven. Others contest that no one is innocent, that we are all sinners by nature.

Annhilationists believe the wicked merely cease to exist, while their blessed counterparts go on with a heavenly afterlife. Universalists believe everyone is welcomed inside the fabled pearly gates. Each religion, each denomination, each person has an opinion on who will go to hell, what it looks like, what it all means.

Depending on whom you ask, different groups of people inhabit hell. No one is safe from the speculation and finger-pointing: atheists, who turn away from god; hypocrites, who may look toward god with either of their two faces; followers of other faiths; neighbors; friends; or family. The general rule is that hell is for the wicked.

"You're good, you go to heaven," said Eric Powell, a senior public relations major and non-denominational Christian. "You're bad, you go to hell."

The underworld was once the home of all the dead, not just the wicked. This universal Land of the Dead first appeared on the clay tablets of the Sumerians who lived in present-day Iraq about 4,000 years ago. Slowly, though, the idea of reward or punishment after death began to emerge. Egyptian mythology held that each soul had to face a judgment where the person's metaphysical heart was weighed to determine his worth. Zoroastrianism, the first dualistic religion, which has barely survived time, contributed to the belief in separate dwellings for the blessed and the damned.

The landscape of hell also changes with the source, depending on religious affiliation.

Underworld scenery has evolved over time. In early literature, the entrance to hell was an underground cave. Barriers included mountainous terrain and a fiery river. High, well-guarded gates surrounded the area. Greek mythology echoed this mapping of hell. The philosopher Hesiod wrote of the upper and lower realms of Hades. Tartarus, the lower region, was walled in on all sides by bronze. On the inside of the fortress was the abyss and the mansion of the rulers of Hades. Plato, who believed—as some modern Eastern groups do—that hell is staying in our corporeal world, placed Tartarus under the ground of the true earth.. The true earth is a sphere surrounding our world. During Roman antiquity, Virgil put hell directly beneath Naples, Italy.

Early Jewish writings did not include a hell. After influence from other faiths, both hell and paradise were placed in the third heaven from Earth, where it is sometimes described as a horrible wasteland beyond the abyss. Other times, it has both fire and ice as torments.

In other cultures, belief in multiple hells is common. Islam names seven separate hells, including one each for hypocrites, idolaters, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, who, unlike the others, need only stay until the Greater Resurrection at the end of the world.

Some Buddhists also claim seven hells, each with its own punishment. Sufferers are cut to pieces or smashed between two mountains. Sinners of less caliber reside in "frontier" hells as a sort of purgatorial cleansing.

Belief in many hells is one of the main differences between Eastern and Western infernal theories, according to Corbett. Another is that hell is not necessarily a permanent sentence for a wicked life.

"It's certainly no place you want to end up," Corbett said. "It's not a good place to be, but it isn't a place of punishment. It's just simply that, in the whole cycle of death and rebirth and reincarnation throughout many lifetimes, beings live some existences on Earth, some in heaven, and some in any of the various hells, depending on what karma or what moral cause and effect they have taken with them into the next life."

Hell, then, is not permanent in these traditions. The only permanent destination is to escape from the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. But to escape to Moksha (Hinduism) or Nirvana (Buddhism) is not a reward from a god, either.

"In the West, you've got the concept of a god out there who is rewarding or punishing," Corbett said. "It's like the law of gravity. The actions have their

hell is only in your head

reactions."

But not all Western versions of hell claim the same god or mythology.

According to one brand of theology called Gnosticism, our world was created by a lower god, the son of a foolish angel trying to imitate a higher and unknown god. Our world, created in ignorance of the true god, is hell. Gnostics hope to reach the levels of the higher god, but since hell is the here and now, punishment for nonbelievers is never anything worse than what we might experience every day.

"One of the more recent concepts of hell is that it would be a very personal sort of thing," Newton said. "It can become comical."

"Hell's a personal creation," said Devin Robling, a senior architecture major and agnostic from a Baptist background. "I'd want to visit. I'd want to see the fruits of my labor."

Robling cited another interesting view of hell in the play *No Exit* by John Paul Sartre, where three characters find that "hell is other people." Placed in a comfortable room with two strangers, the character Garcin asks, "Where are the instruments of torture ... the racks and red-hot pincers and all the other paraphernalia?"

The Inferno and beyond

Indeed, where are the instruments of punishment of past hell concepts, such as those described by Dante Alighieri in his Inferno? Since *The Divine Comedy*, hell just hasn't been the same; hell's landscape and systems of retribution changed forever once the poet wrote his version. Dante, looking around at everything done before him, used traditional ideas with originality to add original ideas to tradition. His hell became hell. He created an elaborate allegory; he told a story; he named names. The history of hell reached its pinnacle in Dante's *Inferno*.

"Dante scared the hell out of me," said Cooksey.

hell is not knowing

"His pictoral of hell — the devil, that whole system — probably frightened me more and created more of a deterrent within me than anything that had been told to me by the Church [of God] in 18 years. Although the church wants to scare you with hell, they don't want to gross you out."

But the *Inferno* did more than repulse readers. For some, Dante provided a bridge between traditional hell concepts and secular infernal ideology.

Hell emerged as a metaphysical entity long before Dante's cantos were written, with hell as a counterculture to the perfect. Hell is a necessary part of a dualistic system of a cosmological battle—not a divine battle between a god and a demon, but a grapple between positive and negative energies. The result is a balance of opposing forces causing friction, which creates energy or life.

According to this theory, the positive is the perfect something that we are drawn to, and the negative is what tries to pull us away. In the middle is a tension, the place where humans dwell.

This balancing act between positive and negative forces is not an invention of modern philosophy. Some Eastern traditions reflect the same ideas. One of them, Taoism, has enjoyed a recent popularity. The yin-yang, the traditional symbol of this faith system, is itself an equilibrium of opposing energies. Some Native Americans, such as the Pueblos, also see the universe as a delicate balance of parts.

The specifics of the energies are lost on us as human beings, though. "Positive" and "negative" are words that were chosen to label something we can't quite grasp, Cooksey said.

"It doesn't matter that we don't understand the extremes because the in-between are what is important," she said. "Usually, life is a hybrid. It's a mixture of the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, the heaven and the hell."

The Great Below

So hell, as Wetzel said, cannot be pinned down. But maybe that is the point. Hell is a place or a state of existence, with physical tortures or with nothing at all, with hope of escape or not. Hell is the life we live now, the life we might have next time around, the afterlife we hope to avoid, or the energy that pulls us back from the little piece of god that we really want. Or maybe hell is, as Cooksey speculated, just a word in our culture that we have chosen to describe something we do not understand—a word we can put a face on and call Lucifer, a word we can shape into anything we want.

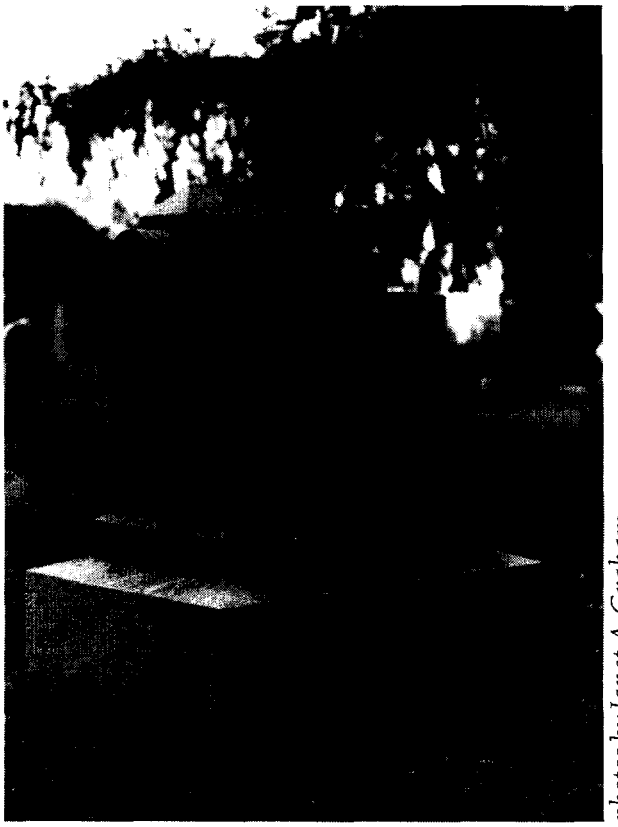
"Hell can be anything," Wetzel said. "We don't know what it is."

Possibly hell is all the things of our imaginations, or none of them. And maybe the final joke of the divine comedy is that we may never know for certain who will claim the last laugh.

The Grave

by Lorin K. Rader

I decide on cremation and a gentle, admirable sprinkling into a body of water. That is before I talk to my mother.



photos by Janet A. Graham

She has the whole thing planned when I arrive. She looks haggard in a respectable sort of way, as though she has stayed up all night but for a good cause. I know she won't tell me if she hasn't slept so I don't ask. But I know. I know when I see she has taken care to put on make-up so early in the morning. I know when I see how neatly things are stacked up on the table before her. I know she has not gone to bed the night before. I know she has been making arrangements on a yellow legal pad for hours.

I know she is going to change my mind about a few things.

I go to visit Dad at the hospital, where he is hooked up to every machine they can think of. He already looks dead compared to how I remember him, but they keep saying words like hope, faith and alive. So we come to pat his hand and think about cemetery plots and how we never made provisions for this. Living wills, sure, but none of those machines is actually keeping him alive. He's doing that. So there's no question of a plug to pull. It's all about wanting him to be the same.

I'm the same. Dying is a lot like winning the lottery. It doesn't mean you'll quit your job and sail to the Bahamas. It doesn't mean you'll quit anything. It doesn't mean you have less to do. It doesn't mean anything except that you have less time.

When I tell him, Dad looks at me with big jealous eyes. The tubes down his throat keep him from saying anything. He's too dehydrated to waste water on tears. But his eyes are jealous. I've won the grand prize.

I spend the weekend walking through graveyards for the space my mother wants to purchase. Carter says it's morbid and he'll have no part of it. So I wander around them alone, thinking of all the reasons why he should be there with me. He's so full of eternal hope for life. Normally I would not mind such optimism, but, realistically, this will be done at some point for each of us. He just turns away, denying me reality, denying me himself. I tell him this is it. This is why you shouldn't fall in love with someone while you are trying to deal with death because they don't always understand you. And that is when he stares at me with the same look my dad gives me. Jealous that I can say things like that. No one can deny me this.

For three days I look for a space through every graveyard in the city. I even take a drive in Carter's car to the country and look through a few places. There are old women in hats sitting on benches in every one of the cemeteries. They stare at me accusingly as I walk up and down the rows. It gives me something to wonder about as I look the place over. The jealousy thing again, but they don't know. What have I won, in their eyes? Stare at me because I am alive in the place of the dead. Stare at me because I walk, young, past the old. Stare at me because I look like I have nothing to do with death.

Mom wants a plot where she can lay flowers and drop tears. I tell her she should not need a place. It's all about what the person was before death, not about where they rot. She comes fairly close to crying for a moment, but takes control just in time. She wants to know how I can be so callous about it in my situation. Reality, I say. I'm in it. We cannot deny what is happening, no matter how much hope Carter may spread around.

Mom steers us back to the grave, as she always does, away from hope. She needs one, she says. It's selfish not to leave a place for people to mourn your death.

I remind her that she already has one, chosen years ago from the cemetery a few blocks away. Close to home so that all the neighbors can lay offerings on the ground, whispering her and Dad's names in solemn moments.

She stares at me as if I have nothing to do with death. Your death, she repeats.

Carter wants to know what the mound of belongings in our bedroom means. I am purging myself of possessions, I tell him. His denial breaks, and he admits he knows what I am talking about. He runs to our bedroom and locks the door. He doesn't answer the door when I knock on the door, then start pounding on it, screaming. In a while he opens the door back up. The pile of my things I have spent all afternoon creating is gone, put away in their rightful places. His arms reach for me and he cries, saying you'll need these; you'll need all this. I sigh and agree with him, letting him sob on my shoulder. OK, I say, I'll need these things. I will.

My mother thinks she is convincing me that cremation is a bad idea. It's not normal, she says. I tell her to look at me, look at me for once without seeing my hair in barrettes and a retainer in my mouth. Look at me without seeing me straight from the womb. Look at me as though I were a person. Look at me as though I weren't just something to find a place for.

Carter won't let go of me for hours. Finally he releases me. I tell him I am going to go see my dad, but I don't. I drive his car to the suburb where I grew up. I buy a pack of cigarettes at the corner store where I always used to buy candy with my allowance. The woman at the counter stares at me, trying to place me. I walk out and down the street

to the cemetery we would run past as kids. In the dark we wouldn't have even thought of going near it, but I do now. I try to find graves of people I have known, but there is only one. I sit down beside her grave and smoke the cigarettes, one after the other.

I tell my mother that I don't want the word god in the service. She is horrified by the thought and by me. What about the prayer, she says. The whole service is to give your soul to god, she says. I tell her even if there is a god, my soul is as useless as my body at this point.

I talk to Dad about Carter and how he won't accept that he may have to live the rest of his life without me. The tubes in his throat move slightly as if he wants to say something and could, if it weren't for the damn tubes. I ask him if he wants me to rip them out for him. He looks at me with jealous eyes again, maybe wishing he could rip the tubes from his own throat, maybe wishing he could grant me permission to do it for him, probably wishing he didn't fear what would happen if the tubes weren't there.

Mom hosts a dinner for the family, and I am supposed to help. It's a last supper for the martyr daughter. I am supposed to prove that I can live up to some female role model by making a gelatin mold once in my short lifetime. I am supposed to reassure the relatives that I am surely dying in the most delicate way possible.

Most of them show up, but it's a small bunch. My aunt and her children are there to stare at me. She won't be with us much longer, kids, go talk to her. My brother and his wife are there. She's dying and Mother says she is being very immature about the whole thing. My dad's brother is there with his new girlfriend and her son. Go talk to the nice girl. It's all right.

I make the gelatin mold and help set the table without breaking any dishes. Carter watches me from where he sits on the living room floor talking to my 4-year-old cousin. My brother's wife offers to carry things for me as soon as I pick them up. My uncle's girlfriend looks nervously around the kitchen, asking in a cheerful voice if there is anything she can do.

I doze for awhile in the graveyard with my head resting on her headstone. I try to think of what it was like for her to die and how I could barely remember knowing her. We were so young and she was just one of the many kids in the neighborhood we played with. I try to remember my reaction to her death back then—if I had cried or if I had ever been to her grave before. Had the place chosen for her given anyone any comfort? Had they littered the ground with rose petals at her demise? Did it matter, I ask myself. I smoke the rest of the cigarettes and drive home.

During dinner Carter tells the family that I have quit smoking. They all look at me. I can hear the silent questions they all have. *It wasn't cancer, was it? I thought it was— What are young people dying of these days? I thought she was dying. Why give up smoking now?* My uncle's girlfriend breaks a long pause, congratulating me in a shrill voice. I stare at Carter, wondering what he is trying to do. My mother glares at him. She clears her throat and says finally that we are, after all, hoping for a complete recovery. I turn to her, but I say nothing.

Mom steers us back to the grave, as she always does, away from hope.

My mother says it is stupid to want to be burned instead of buried. Burned, she says, as though we are talking of sin. She asks why I have to be so difficult. My father already has his service and burial planned.

Dad can't talk now, I say. It's easy to make decisions for him, isn't it?

She stands quickly and knocks over her pile of neatly organized papers and brochures. He had his planned before he lost his voice, she says.

Well, I say, he had more than twenty-five years of

life to think about death, didn't he?

When I get home Carter is mad. Somehow it has become three o'clock in the morning. Visiting hours were over long ago, he says. I try to go past him to the bathroom to get some aspirin, but he holds me by the shoulders. You're all set to die, he says. You don't even care what it does to the those still alive.

Would it make it easier if I went kicking and screaming? I ask. If it will, I say, tell me. I'll do it. Then you can all sit around afterward and talk about how much I loved life. Tell me you want me to bang my head against this wall, I say.

Carter pulls me to him, pressing his lips to my ear. He says nothing.

It turns out my uncle's new girlfriend has found the god I am lacking. She commands my attention after dinner, pulling me by the elbow into the den. He will accept you, she says. You just have to ask.

I don't have anything to ask for, I say, trying to make my escape.

He'll forgive you for the sin you and Carter have committed, she says loudly as I walk away. I turn and go back to her.

Is that what you think, I ask. You have some nerve, not knowing me at all, never having met him. You can think what you want, I say. But if you believe you can dole out blame that easily, don't be surprised when you end up in the same position.

She stares at me. I can tell I have not changed her mind about anything. We were talking about god, she says. You can trust in him.

This whole thing came from trust, I say. Trust takes much more than a few simple words.

My mother thinks I should visit all the relatives who could not attend the dinner before I get any weaker. It would be a nice way to say good-bye to them, and it might be nice to get out instead of just sitting in that apartment feeling sorry for yourself, she says.

I don't sit in the apartment all day, I say. I go to work. I don't feel sorry for myself, I tell her. Carter does that enough for the both of us.

Well, she says, they're going to miss you. Why don't you go see them?

I don't know them, I say. They won't miss me. I'd rather spend time by myself, I say. I'll miss me.

Carter goes with me to look at more cemeteries. He won't walk beside me; he stands by the car as I walk around. As I open the car door to leave the last one, he takes my hand. This isn't right, he says. Who wants to be buried in the ground? They'll just build shabby apartment buildings on it as soon as there are too many people in the world for the land we have, he says.

Tell my mother that, I answer.

Sprinkled in a pond somewhere, my mother scoffs. You'll kill the fish.

I tell Dad about his brother's girlfriend's bleached hair and long nails and the fear in her son's eyes. I tell him I made a gelatin mold in the shape of a coffin. His lips move a little into a tiny smile. I hug him the best I can around his set up and go home to clean my closet. I throw things into a large mound on the floor, hoping Carter won't be home for a while. As I separate a few things away from the pile for my brother and his wife, the phone rings. My mother is on the line asking me what in the world did you tell your father, what in god's name did you say to him? The nurses don't know what to do with him, she says. He's screaming. He's ripped the tubes from his neck, and he's screaming at the top of his lungs. ■

We can get our idea on life from television commercials, but don't expect reality to be filled with promise, love, friendship or just the right amount of bagginess. *by Lori K. Rader*

I want a life like a Levi's 501 jeans commercial. I want to go running down the street with a potted plant in one arm and the fingers of my other hand laced through those of some ruggedly handsome man. I want to look like Tod Oldham dresses me every morning as a personal hobby. I want 20 male gymnasts defying gravity in huge sand dunes, just for me.

What I want is the life that Levi Strauss promises between videos on MTV—a life filled with promise, love, friendship and just the right amount of bagginess.

I want a life like a jeans commercial, where there's always someone to put an arm casually around your shoulder. I want to pass people on the sidewalk who are carrying large, awkward musical instruments. I want to kick water from puddles at someone. I want to start quick friendships with pony-tailed boys and the Dalmatian puppies they're walking.

The pressure to be a sensitive, denim-wearing body of charm is so great that sometimes I just have to sit back with the remote control and marvel at the genius of ol' Levi. How did that campy frontiersman ever foresee the need for rough-and-ready clothing that doesn't quite fit? How did he know that someday there'd be Really Interesting People paid to wear his product for a 30-second spot on a glowing screen?

Well, he didn't. He just wanted something to cover his union suit. Levi never realized that he would be the creator of a life force.

And, sadly, it is one. I like to dress down as much as the next guy, but Levi's 501 commercials put a lot of pressure on us to be creative and actively youthful. They also threaten us with guilt for being in front of the television instead of out running through fountains.

I want to be unique and quirky and youthful, but normality is lingering over me like a plague. I want to live the life Levi Strauss prophesied for me. But it's really much easier to watch the pretty faces on TV do it than to walk around town with a potted plant tucked under an arm.